34

Posted by u/SidewalkToronto 1 year ago

Hi, we work on buildings and housing at Sidewalk Labs. Ask us anything about Sidewalk Toronto (Aug 6 11-12 ET).

Discussion

After 18 months of planning work and public input, our “Toronto Tomorrow” proposal was released last month. Across 1,500 pages, the proposal outlines a new approach for inclusive growth along the city’s eastern waterfront. Check out https://sidewalktoronto.ca to read the full plan, or whatever parts interest you most!

On **Tuesday, August 6, from 11 a.m. - 12 p.m. ET**, Karim Khalifa (Director of Buildings Innovation) and Annie Koo (Associate Director of Development) will answer your questions about affordable housing and mass timber construction, along with Editorial Director Eric Jaffe (lead writer for the proposal).

You can read more about our specific plans for buildings and housing here. We look forward to answering your questions!

Proof: https://twitter.com/sidewalklabs/status/1157309373858947072

In the coming weeks, other Sidewalk experts will participate in AMAs on specific aspects of the proposal, including sustainable energy and transportation (Aug 13), the Quayside plans and public spaces (Aug 20), and the partnership and business model (Aug 27). The full schedule is here, with links to past AMAs on the overall project and on digital governance.

The AMA sessions are an opportunity for Sidewalk to answer questions and clarify aspects of our proposal — but they aren't part of Waterfront Toronto's public consultation process. You can read more about that process here.

[UPDATED/EDITED] We're signing off at 12:06. Thanks all for the great questions!

34 Comments Share Save Hide Report 76% Upvoted

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amnguincct 1 year ago
What city do you live in?

22 Share Report Save

SidewalkToronto 1 year ago
Thanks for the question. Annie is originally from McAllen, Texas, and now lives in New York. Karim has lived in cities all over the world, including Valera (Venezuela), Washington DC, Lima, Frankfurt, and is now in NYC as well, where Sidewalk Labs is headquartered.

Of course, we all work very closely with our colleagues based in Toronto. As CEO Dan Doctoroff noted in his AMA, we now have a staff of more than 30 people based in Toronto, at our local headquarters of 307 Lake Shore Blvd East. That’s a big share of our company, which is still a fairly small startup of only about 100 people.

Our Toronto-based staff includes urban planners and former public servants with years of experience working on major city projects, including Toronto’s West Don Lands and East Bayfront developments, the Bentway park beneath the Gardiner Expressway, the Evergreen Brick Works site, the Eglinton Crosstown rapid transit line, and many others.

This team has also worked closely with every public-sector development agency, including CreateTO, Toronto Community Housing Corporation, and Infrastructure Ontario. We also have people who have worked directly in City of Toronto government.

In developing our Toronto Tomorrow proposal, we also worked closely with more than 100 local firms on the research, engineering, and design work, including PARTISANS, RWDI, urbanMetrics, and many others.

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stayxcurious 1 year ago
How exactly will people be able to access the below-market priced homes? Right now, finding affordable housing is hard for everyone, so there will definitely be the demand. How will the process be fair, transparent, equitable?

13 Share Report Save

SidewalkToronto 1 year ago
Thanks for the great questions. (Annie will take this one.)

Some quick context for others: our proposal includes 40% below-market units in the Quayside and Villiers West neighbourhoods (the two areas where Sidewalk Labs proposes to be lead developer, with local partners). 20% of units would be affordable housing as officially defined by the City of Toronto (meaning at or below 100% Average Market Rent), with a quarter of that going to households in need of “deep” affordability. Another 20% of units would go towards middle-income households who right now can’t qualify for affordable housing but also can’t afford market prices.

In total, we’ve proposed to build about 1,700 below-market units in Quayside and Villiers West.

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Now, to your questions: It's essential, as you note, that the process be fair, transparent, and equitable. People would be able to access below-market units the same way they do with affordable units today. This is a process determined and vetted by the City, with accompanying "Access Plans" that set forth fair and transparent lease-up processes. We would work with them to develop our process like other developers must do.

We also recognize that finding affordable housing can be hard right now. That's why we've had initial discussions with the City on what a streamlined application process could look like for ALL housing options in Quayside, including below-market units. The idea for this new process is to address many of the pain points in the existing process:

First, instead of having people apply to housing through many different lists, there would be one centralized place to apply for affordable rental housing, not just rent-geared-to-income housing (which does have a centralized list already).

Second, instead of having people keep track of all their separate applications to different developers, they would use a common application with a single form.

Finally, instead of having to wait and wonder about your housing status, you could get real-time updates through the new application.

You can read more about this idea on Page 277 of the Buildings and Housing chapter (link).

5 Share Report Save

[deleted] 1 year ago

Will there be facial recognition system used in any capacity?

11 Share Report Save

SidewalkToronto 1 year ago

Thanks for your question. Simply put, there are no plans for facial recognition in our proposal.

More broadly, we have proposed a rigorous process for responsible data use, anchored by an independent, government-sanctioned entity called an Urban Data Trust.

You can read more about our plans for data and digital governance at last week's AMA - link.

2 Share Report Save

SpaceDavy 1 year ago

Hello, How will the change in building materials effect noise? I imagine these units to be quite noisy and the picture above looks like noise will echo in the area due to the dome.

Will living in an affordable unit here be quiet inside?

11 Share Report Save

SidewalkToronto 1 year ago

Thanks for the question. (Karim will take this one.)

You note the new building materials. That's mass timber, an emerging type of engineered wood made by compressing multiple pieces of timber together. Mass timber is as strong as steel and twice as strong as concrete by weight, yet it is far more sustainable, easier to manufacture and assemble (leading to faster housing projects), and also just as fire-resistant.

There are a number of mass timber buildings emerging around the world -- including some notable ones in Canada. That includes the 18-storey Brock Commons in Vancouver, as well as at least four tall timber buildings planned or in the works in Toronto. We think Quayside can be the first neighbourhood built ENTIRELY of mass timber.

To your question of noise inside units: Mass timber buildings can be just as quiet as buildings made from other materials, and we're planning to ensure that's the case. For example, our interior walls would be 10 cm thick with an acoustic insulation designed to be as sound-resistant as conventional walls.

To make sure we can really deliver quiet spaces, we have engaged with acoustic specialists that do acoustic models from our designs, and then we would build out sections of the building to do physical performance tests.

You can read more about mass timber on Pages 210-219, and you can read more about interior walls on Pages 246-250 of the Buildings and Housing chapter (link).

5 Share Report Save

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hyperperforator **Leslieville** 1 year ago

If we are excited about the project, rather than negative, is there a constructive way to express support? It seems like the current feedback processes for the city largely are attracting the type of people who want to complain about something that bothers them personally, which makes it seem like sentiment is overall negative. I am cautiously optimistic about what the project can do for the city, but am unsure how to contribute that opinion without being drowned by the negativity?

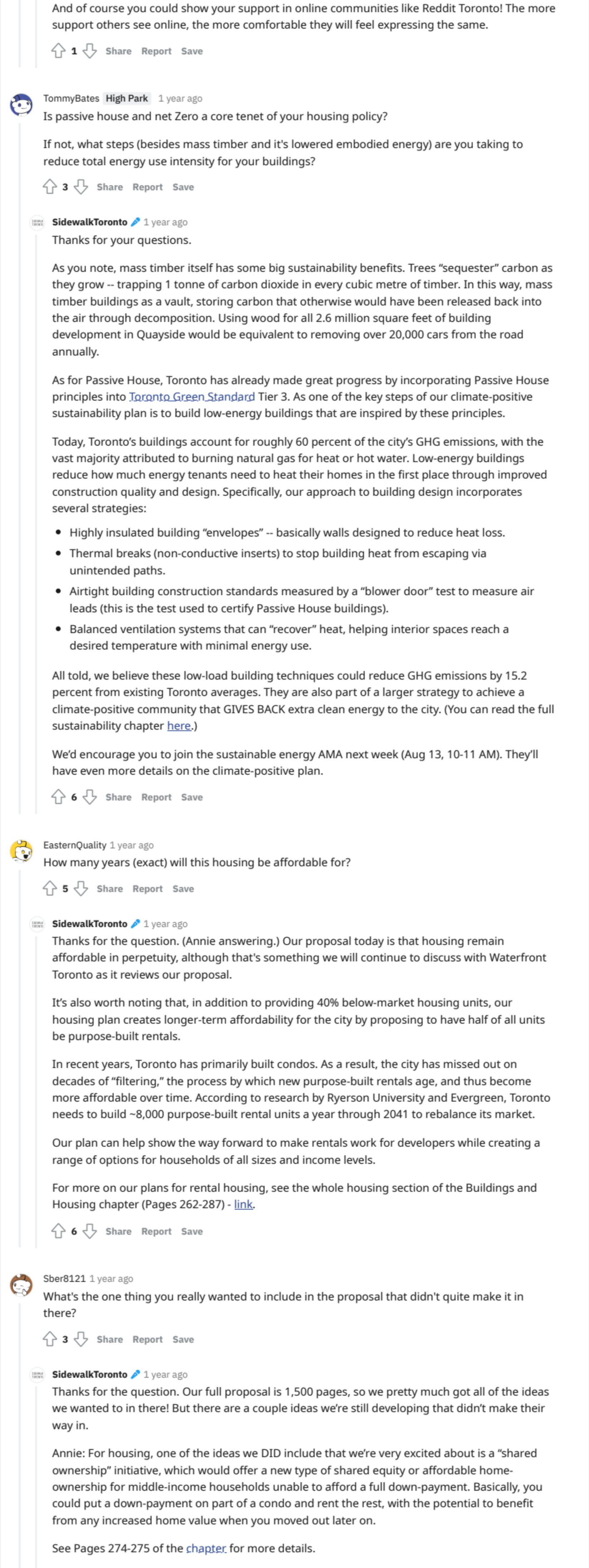
8 Share Report Save

SidewalkToronto 1 year ago

Thanks for the question -- and we appreciate your excitement about the project. We agree that this project is a great opportunity for Toronto to achieve its ambitions for affordable housing, easier transportation, greater sustainability, and more economic opportunity.

There are a number of ways you can express your support. First off, you can continue to provide feedback to Waterfront Toronto through its ongoing public consultation efforts, including an online survey. There's more information here.

Additionally, the City Council of Toronto will be among the key decision-makers for this process, and we'd encourage you to write or call them to voice your support!



And of course you could show your support in online communities like Reddit Toronto! The more support others see online, the more comfortable they will feel expressing the same.

TommyBates High Park 1 year ago

Is passive house and net Zero a core tenet of your housing policy?

If not, what steps (besides mass timber and it's lowered embodied energy) are you taking to reduce total energy use intensity for your buildings?

SidewalkToronto 1 year ago

Thanks for your questions.

As you note, mass timber itself has some big sustainability benefits. Trees “sequester” carbon as they grow -- trapping 1 tonne of carbon dioxide in every cubic metre of timber. In this way, mass timber buildings as a vault, storing carbon that otherwise would have been released back into the air through decomposition. Using wood for all 2.6 million square feet of building development in Quayside would be equivalent to removing over 20,000 cars from the road annually.

As for Passive House, Toronto has already made great progress by incorporating Passive House principles into Toronto Green Standard Tier 3. As one of the key steps of our climate-positive sustainability plan is to build low-energy buildings that are inspired by these principles.

Today, Toronto’s buildings account for roughly 60 percent of the city’s GHG emissions, with the vast majority attributed to burning natural gas for heat or hot water. Low-energy buildings reduce how much energy tenants need to heat their homes in the first place through improved construction quality and design. Specifically, our approach to building design incorporates several strategies:

- Highly insulated building “envelopes” -- basically walls designed to reduce heat loss.
- Thermal breaks (non-conductive inserts) to stop building heat from escaping via unintended paths.
- Airtight building construction standards measured by a “blower door” test to measure air leads (this is the test used to certify Passive House buildings).
- Balanced ventilation systems that can “recover” heat, helping interior spaces reach a desired temperature with minimal energy use.

All told, we believe these low-load building techniques could reduce GHG emissions by 15.2 percent from existing Toronto averages. They are also part of a larger strategy to achieve a climate-positive community that GIVES BACK extra clean energy to the city. (You can read the full sustainability chapter here.)

We’d encourage you to join the sustainable energy AMA next week (Aug 13, 10-11 AM). They’ll have even more details on the climate-positive plan.

EasternQuality 1 year ago

How many years (exact) will this housing be affordable for?

SidewalkToronto 1 year ago

Thanks for the question. (Annie answering.) Our proposal today is that housing remain affordable in perpetuity, although that's something we will continue to discuss with Waterfront Toronto as it reviews our proposal.

It’s also worth noting that, in addition to providing 40% below-market housing units, our housing plan creates longer-term affordability for the city by proposing to have half of all units be purpose-built rentals.

In recent years, Toronto has primarily built condos. As a result, the city has missed out on decades of “filtering,” the process by which new purpose-built rentals age, and thus become more affordable over time. According to research by Ryerson University and Evergreen, Toronto needs to build ~8,000 purpose-built rental units a year through 2041 to rebalance its market.

Our plan can help show the way forward to make rentals work for developers while creating a range of options for households of all sizes and income levels.

For more on our plans for rental housing, see the whole housing section of the Buildings and Housing chapter (Pages 262-287) - link.

Sber8121 1 year ago

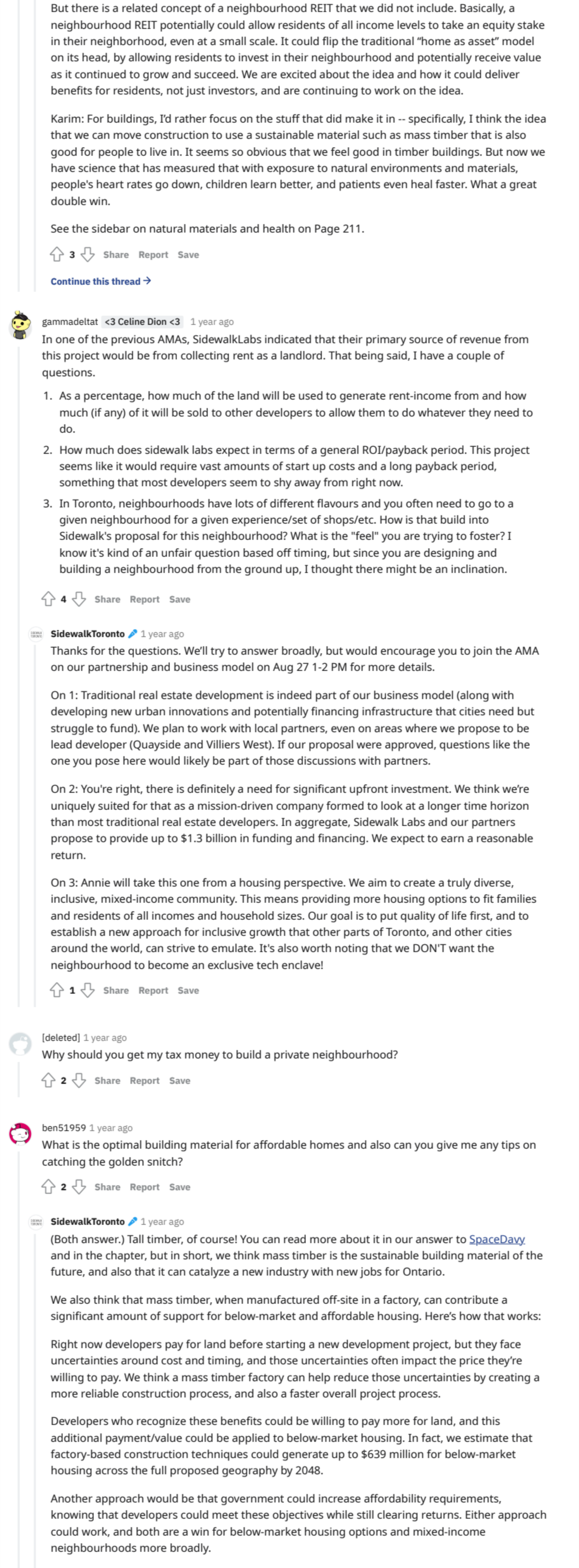
What's the one thing you really wanted to include in the proposal that didn't quite make it in there?

SidewalkToronto 1 year ago

Thanks for the question. Our full proposal is 1,500 pages, so we pretty much got all of the ideas we wanted to in there! But there are a couple ideas we’re still developing that didn’t make their way in.

Annie: For housing, one of the ideas we DID include that we’re very excited about is a “shared ownership” initiative, which would offer a new type of shared equity or affordable home-ownership for middle-income households unable to afford a full down-payment. Basically, you could put a down-payment on part of a condo and rent the rest, with the potential to benefit from any increased home value when you moved out later on.

See Pages 274-275 of the chapter for more details.



But there is a related concept of a neighbourhood REIT that we did not include. Basically, a neighbourhood REIT potentially could allow residents of all income levels to take an equity stake in their neighborhood, even at a small scale. It could flip the traditional "home as asset" model on its head, by allowing residents to invest in their neighbourhood and potentially receive value as it continued to grow and succeed. We are excited about the idea and how it could deliver benefits for residents, not just investors, and are continuing to work on the idea.

Karim: For buildings, I'd rather focus on the stuff that did make it in -- specifically, I think the idea that we can move construction to use a sustainable material such as mass timber that is also good for people to live in. It seems so obvious that we feel good in timber buildings. But now we have science that has measured that with exposure to natural environments and materials, people's heart rates go down, children learn better, and patients even heal faster. What a great double win.

See the sidebar on natural materials and health on Page 211.

Continue this thread →

gammadeltat <3 Celine Dion <3 1 year ago

In one of the previous AMAs, SidewalkLabs indicated that their primary source of revenue from this project would be from collecting rent as a landlord. That being said, I have a couple of questions.

1. As a percentage, how much of the land will be used to generate rent-income from and how much (if any) of it will be sold to other developers to allow them to do whatever they need to do.
2. How much does sidewalk labs expect in terms of a general ROI/payback period. This project seems like it would require vast amounts of start up costs and a long payback period, something that most developers seem to shy away from right now.
3. In Toronto, neighbourhoods have lots of different flavours and you often need to go to a given neighbourhood for a given experience/set of shops/etc. How is that build into Sidewalk's proposal for this neighbourhood? What is the "feel" you are trying to foster? I know it's kind of an unfair question based off timing, but since you are designing and building a neighbourhood from the ground up, I thought there might be an inclination.

SidewalkToronto 1 year ago

Thanks for the questions. We'll try to answer broadly, but would encourage you to join the AMA on our partnership and business model on Aug 27 1-2 PM for more details.

On 1: Traditional real estate development is indeed part of our business model (along with developing new urban innovations and potentially financing infrastructure that cities need but struggle to fund). We plan to work with local partners, even on areas where we propose to be lead developer (Quayside and Villiers West). If our proposal were approved, questions like the one you pose here would likely be part of those discussions with partners.

On 2: You're right, there is definitely a need for significant upfront investment. We think we're uniquely suited for that as a mission-driven company formed to look at a longer time horizon than most traditional real estate developers. In aggregate, Sidewalk Labs and our partners propose to provide up to $1.3 billion in funding and financing. We expect to earn a reasonable return.

On 3: Annie will take this one from a housing perspective. We aim to create a truly diverse, inclusive, mixed-income community. This means providing more housing options to fit families and residents of all incomes and household sizes. Our goal is to put quality of life first, and to establish a new approach for inclusive growth that other parts of Toronto, and other cities around the world, can strive to emulate. It's also worth noting that we DON'T want the neighbourhood to become an exclusive tech enclave!

[deleted] 1 year ago

Why should you get my tax money to build a private neighbourhood?

ben51959 1 year ago

What is the optimal building material for affordable homes and also can you give me any tips on catching the golden snitch?

SidewalkToronto 1 year ago

(Both answer.) Tall timber, of course! You can read more about it in our answer to SpaceDavy and in the chapter, but in short, we think mass timber is the sustainable building material of the future, and also that it can catalyze a new industry with new jobs for Ontario.

We also think that mass timber, when manufactured off-site in a factory, can contribute a significant amount of support for below-market and affordable housing. Here's how that works:

Right now developers pay for land before starting a new development project, but they face uncertainties around cost and timing, and those uncertainties often impact the price they're willing to pay. We think a mass timber factory can help reduce those uncertainties by creating a more reliable construction process, and also a faster overall project process.

Developers who recognize these benefits could be willing to pay more for land, and this additional payment/value could be applied to below-market housing. In fact, we estimate that factory-based construction techniques could generate up to $639 million for below-market housing across the full proposed geography by 2048.

Another approach would be that government could increase affordability requirements, knowing that developers could meet these objectives while still clearing returns. Either approach could work, and both are a win for below-market housing options and mixed-income neighbourhoods more broadly.

You can read more about how factory construction contributes to affordable and below-market housing on Pages 280-285 of the Buildings and Housing chapter (link).

As for catching the golden snitch, you'll have to wait for the J. K. Rowling AMA :)

1 Share Report Save

Toolus 1 year ago

Is this project in billy bishop's flight path, and if so how will that impact it?

2 Share Report Save

[deleted] 1 year ago

Why did you guys hire a botnet on Twitter to support Sidewalk Labs?

The botnet tweets out articles for whoever pays them, so yes, the articles are from a variety of sources.

I struggle to believe that someone who isn't Sidewalk Labs paid a for-rent botnet to publicly support them. If not you, who else?

1 Share Report Save

[deleted] 1 year ago

The waterfront will flood more and more over the next few years. All the predictions show massive, regular flooding in Toronto south of Front street.

Why is it a smart idea to spend billions on infrastructure that will be under water?

The boardwalks the city built along the waterfront less than 5 years ago are underwater and destroyed now, and it'll cost millions to repair them - not that it makes sense to repair them.

1 Share Report Save

gammadeltat <3 Celine Dion <3 1 year ago

The AMA is over, suggest asking this in a latter AMA.

1 Share Report Save

torontoguy99 1 year ago

Neat!

0 Share Report Save

More posts from the toronto community

2.4k

Posted by u/1itapphil 4 days ago

Picture **Last night on Woodbine Beach**

© Phil Marion

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4

PROMOTED · Posted by u/upwork 28 days ago

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2.2k

Posted by u/Cutanea 4 days ago

Picture "Do you want grandkids? Buy a house for your kid." Realtors working on their actual audience

i.imgur.com/GJBMN8...

SEE FULL IMAGE

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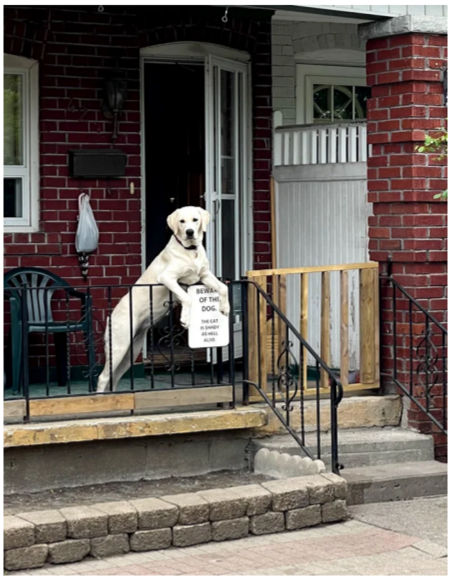
1.7k

Posted by u/benrules2 5 days ago

Picture Saw this very scary dog posing with his warning sign this morning. The cat was nowhere in sight, which was even more scary TBH.



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Posted by u/Yashemski 6 days ago

Picture Canoeing the islands

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